

MID-WINTER BIRD LIFE AT NASHVILLE

The mid-winter bird list at Nashville numbers between fifty and sixty. The Bluebird, Cardinal, Flicker, Junco, Mockingbird, Field Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Towhee, Downy Woodpecker, and Carolina Wren are rated as abundant. The Bobwhite, Carolina Chickadee, Crow, Mourning Dove, Goldfinch, Golden-crowned Kinglet, Meadow-lark, Robin, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Savannah Sparrow, Tufted Titmouse, Myrtle Warbler, Hairy Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, and Bewick's Wren are rated as common. The Brown Creeper, Lesser Scaup Duck, Purple Finch, Sparrow Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, Bluejay, Killdeer, Prairie Horned Lark, White-breasted Nuthatch, Screech Owl, Fox Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, White-crowned Sparrow, Hermit Thrush, Pileated Woodpecker, Winter Wren, Turkey Vulture, and Black Vulture are rated as fairly common in mid-winter in the Nashville region. Pick out the birds you would like to see on the field trip at the Nashville meeting and tell the Local Committee.

COMMUNICATIONS

Editor, WILSON BULLETIN: I have read with much interest your review of Mr. A. C. Bent's "Life Histories of North American Marsh Birds," published in the WILSON BULLETIN for September, 1927, pages 187 and 188. Since your principal criticism deals directly with that part of this work for which I am responsible and because it is believed that you have not understood the system followed I feel that this letter of explanation is warranted to clear up any similar misunderstanding that may exist among other readers of the BULLETIN.

The truth of your statement that we need detailed work on the distribution and migration of North American birds is fully appreciated but as this is a subject that if treated in proper detail would occupy a great amount of space it could not be included in a general work of the character of Mr. Bent's life histories. It is regretted that no technical bulletin on this subject has been issued from the Biological Survey since about 1916. You will be interested to know, however, that I now have in course of preparation, two manuscripts on this subject.

In the life history bulletin, however, it was impossible to give the great mass of detailed information that is available concerning the distribution and migration of our native birds but if you will compare the last volume with those preceding it you will find that this phase of the subject has been treated more fully than ever before. Even so I found that it was impossible to give more than a general sketch showing the general breeding range, winter range, and the outstanding features of the spring and fall migrations. In working out the breeding range the method employed was to start at the northwest corner working across to the eastward, thence down the east to the southeast corner, across to the southwest corner, and back to the starting point. The theoretical perfect range is thus worked out in a quadrangle. The same system was followed with regard to winter ranges. Obviously, if a bird is known to breed between certain north and south limits it may be safely considered to breed at all intermediate areas where the conditions are suitable.

To take the example that you use of the coot, by reference to our distribution maps it is noted that this bird is known to breed in no less than 34 different

states in addition to seven provinces of Canada. It must, however, be obvious that if this bird breeds north to British Columbia, Mackenzie, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, and south to Central America, it is likely to breed in any intermediate region where a suitable habitat is found.

In giving the migration records of birds, lack of space demands that they be kept down as much as possible, so it is my usual custom to select not more than three or four typical records for each state for each migratory season. Even then it is difficult to keep the migration portion down to a reasonable size. For example you will find that this portion of the distribution section of the coot occupies two and one-half pages of solid print.

The introduction of maps as you suggest would, of course, add interest but would also increase the expense of publication which is a factor that must be considered and it also is my personal opinion that they would be more or less out of place in a series of bulletins such as has been undertaken by Mr. Bent. It seems more natural to look for them in the technical bulletins of the Biological Survey that deal specifically with distribution and migration problems. Those now in progress will be fully illustrated in this respect.

I appreciate that your criticism has been given in a friendly spirit and my only desire in replying is to clarify the situation that exists with reference to this series and to explain the system employed in working out these portions of the publication.

Very truly yours,

FREDERICK C. LINCOLN,
U. S. Biological Survey.

WASHINGTON, D. C., October 29, 1927.

[Editor's Comment. We concur in all of the opinions expressed in Mr. Lincoln's letter, believing this to be consistent with our previous review. The only opinion we wish still to insist upon is that a more elaborate statement of distribution is needed; Mr. Lincoln also concurs in this, and, furthermore, assures us that such reports are in preparation and will be illustrated. Nothing more needs to be said, perhaps, except for the Editor to offer his apology for bringing the matter up.]

Editor, WILSON BULLETIN: The autobiography of Mr. Otto Widmann in the last issue of the WILSON BULLETIN is of great interest to his host of admirers. As one of the many who have been favored with his advice and suggestions, I should like to mention a very remarkable characteristic of this eminent authority, and that is, his wonderful handwriting. I am sure very few people indeed, at any age, can pen the beautiful letters so skillfully written by Mr. Widmann. Those who are so fortunate as to have letters from him in their possession, will preserve them, not only for the knowledge such letters always impart, but also as perfect specimens of the art of handwriting, now perhaps decadent.

Yours truly,

Thos. H. Whitney.

ATLANTIC, IOWA, November 7, 1927.